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The Follett House
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The Follett House was built in 1858 and opened as a hotel on July 4, 1859, under the management of John M. Davis. The building was financed by a stock company of which Benjamin Follett was principle shareholder.[1] The building takes its name from this gentleman (figure 1). The former hotel is a rectangular, four-story, brick structure; measuring 60 feet long and 100 feet wide. The masonry bearing walls rise from a rubble and earthen basement to a flat roof. The roof is broken by a slight curve in the cornice and parapet, and three end chimneys (figure 2). It is part of an historic district known as Depot Town. The Follett House is an example of the commercial Italianate style of architecture. This paper will include, among other things, a discussion of features of the building which are typical and atypical of this style.

Beginning your description should be in this section below

The main facade faces south across Cross Street. It is one of the three fully visible facades. Only a small portion of the east side of the building is visible where it juts above its shorter, abutting neighbor. The south facade exhibits a two-part structure typical of commercial blocks.[2] The building is horizontally divided into two distinct zones (figure 3). The

lower portion of the building is a single story of retail space separated from the upper portion by its own cornice. Five store fronts and three entryways make up the lower story.

Reduced costs in the manufacturing of plate glass and technological advances in the casting of iron at the time of the building's original construction influenced the features of this lower story. There are broad expanses of glass framed and supported by cast iron columns which feature ornament that Follett and his shareholders could never have afforded in carved stone.[3] Two examples of this affordable decoration are the capitals in figures 4 and 5. All five store fronts exhibit these cast iron supports and a variety of different capitals. Beneath the wide plate glass windows are wooden kickboards. The present tenants have an unfortunate tendency to fill these large windows with neon or obscure them with awnings. Above the windows is a horizontal framing member which creates a transom of clerestory glass just below the separating cornice (figure 6 and 7).

The entrances to the shops are recessed, allowing the doors to swing freely without disrupting sidewalk traffic. There are three secondary entrances into the building that are not recessed. The westernmost of these opens inward, directly onto a staircase leading to the upper floors. Through my research, I have developed a theory about the way this entrance might have been used. The Ypsilanti Press published an article in 1928 describing a New Year's celebration at the Follett House in 1875. The article was based in part on the recollections of Mrs. Florence S. Babbitt, who had attended the ball. According to this article:

> At the front of the hotel were two entrances, one the ladies'

> entrance and the other for the men direct into the office. The ladies were shown by an attendant to the second floor check rooms where serving girls...were ready to assist in removing and checking wraps and arranging trains before the lady descended to the parlor where her escort awaited her. In the meanwhile the man had passed into the office....From there many of the men passed into the bar room directly back of the office for a drink and a smoke before returning to their companions.[4]

I believe it is possible that the western entrance could have been the "ladies' entrance" to the hotel in the 1890's, although the interior of the building has been altered so much over the years that it is difficult to identify the second floor checkrooms or other rooms mentioned in the article. A large safe was discovered by the present owner, Gerald Meadows, during remodeling of the corner store adjacent to the entrance. This and other evidence, have led Meadows and others to the conclusion that this space once functioned as an office.[5] It is possible that this space held the office referred to in the Ypsilanti Press article.

The second part of the typical two part structure includes the second, third and fourth stories of the building. It is capped by an overhanging cornice. The original cornice has been replaced. It still clung to the building in 1944 (figures 8 and 9), but deterioration of the cornice is evident when these photographs are compared with an earlier photograph of the building (figure 10). Notice that by 1944 the elaborately carved finial, which topped the gentle curve of the cornice over the central bay, had been removed.

The original cornice was removed during the 1960's.[6] At this time a rash of city ordinances was enacted throughout the Midwest requiring the removal of older cornices.

> Seems they [the cornices] had a terrible habit of falling off buildings after so many years of ice build-up in their mounting mortar, and eventually dropped off if the owner wasn't paying close attention to what was happening on the roof. Detroit saw a particularly grisly tragedy in the 1950's when a huge chunk of masonry came loose and killed a shopper along Woodward Avenue.[7]

Figure 11 is a photograph of the Follett House in 1980, which shows the building denuded of its cornice. Figure 12 is a detail of the underside of the new cornice which was added in 1986.[8] It is made of wood, sheathed in copper, and supported by "massive [wooden] brackets reworked from another installation and made [to] fit where the originals hung."[9] Fascia board echoes the curve of the new cornice above the center section of the south facade.

Beneath the cornice, the upper stories sort themselves into three distinct sections: the western section of the facade, the center section, and the eastern section. The western section is plain in comparison to the other two. The third-floor windows are two stories high, reflecting the existence of the huge, two-story ballroom behind. The stains on the brick beneath the windows attest to the cast iron construction of their hoods and sills (figure 13).

The second-story windows are spaced in a line with those of the third floor, but are only one story tall. The cast iron window caps have

been repainted. The design of these caps differs from those on the third story (figure 14). The windows are more widely spaced here than in the other sections of the building. This was typical of hotels built in the commercial Italianate style and is a result of the presence of hotel rooms.[10]

The windows of the center section are grouped in threes (figure 15). On the second floor the simple double-hung sash windows (all the windows on the south and west facades are double-hung sash windows) are separated by narrow brick piers. They are capped with a window hood which makes the windows function visually as a single unit (figure 15a).

The third and fourth-story windows are also designed to function as a single visual unit. They are separated from the second story by a beltcourse. The brick piers which divide the third-story windows are continued up into the fourth-floor Palladian window. Dark cast iron panels cap the third-floor windows and an elaborate masonry hood caps the Palladian window (figure 15b). The curve of the hood is echoed in the cornice above. The whole center bay is set back from the eastern and western ends of the facade in two steps, each one brick thick. This creates brick piers which frame the entire window arrangement of the central bay.

Early photographs of the Follett House indicate the existence of a balcony just beneath the second-floor windows of this central bay (figure 10). No date could be found for the removal of the balcony, but by 1900, photographs indicate it is gone (figure 16). Notice also, in figure 10, that the space between the second and third stories is occupied by the name of the hotel.

There are four windows grouped in pairs across each floor of the eastern section of the main facade (figure 17). The second-story fenestration is once again simpler than that of the upper stories. Each window has its own cast iron cap, narrower but similar in design to the cap which covers the second-story windows of the center section. These caps have not received the same restoration as the others and rust betrays their cast iron construction (figure 17a). Separating the paired windows is a wide brick pier which extends to the cornice line.

The third and fourth-story windows are visually tied together in this section, in much the same way as are those in the center section. Narrow brick piers rise from corbel stops along the beltcourse separating the second and third stories. They help to frame the round-headed Roman windows of the fourth floor. Dark cast iron panels top the third-story windows as they do in the center section. A pier on the eastern corner of the building helps to frame the entire fenestration pattern of the eastern section of the facade.

The west facade of the Follett House is much plainer than its street face (figure 18). The cornice is continued around the building today, just as it was originally. Over the cornice, three chimneys jut above the building's box-like silhouette. Below the cornice are the faded remnants of painted advertisements. Over one of these hangs a cheerful new sign welcoming visitors to Depot Town. A photograph, dated circa 1936, shows what some of these faded ladies looked like in their prime (figure 19). Notice how the advertisements butt right up to the windows. Traces of paint, still visible today, show that the sign painters painted right over part of the third story window pediments. Also, compare the difference in

the silhouette between 1936 and today. In 1936, part of the cornice had been removed and the roof-line was lower to the north. In 1900 (figure 16), the silhouette was still intact.

There is no pattern to the fenestration and door openings of the west facade. Openings are placed wherever needed with little regard to design or symmetry. This lack of design is vaguely reminiscent of seventeenth century attitudes towards fenestration. The third-story windows open onto the ballroom. The cast iron window caps and sills are identical to those of the ballroom windows on the south facade. The second-floor windows are irregularly spaced. Their caps and sills match those of the second-floor windows on the west side of the main facade.

The store front of the westernmost shop continues around the corner to the west side of the building (figure 20). There is a display window framed in cast iron with a kickboard underneath and a cornice return above. Notice the modern embellishment of stained glass in the transom. Two double-hung sash windows and two doorways finish out the first story. They are all capped with the same type of pediment that covers the second story windows. Some modern additions to this side of the building include electric lights and an unattractive rail fence of wolmenized lumber, which defines a sidewalk eating area for the Mean Bean Cafe.

The north facade of the building is a visual horror (figure 21). On the eastern end, the brick is painted the same institutional grey color as the rickety looking fire escape which adorns it. The rest of the facade is unpainted masonry, punctured at irregular intervals by windows and doors both modern and original. Two doors open into mid air. The cornice is not continued on this face of the building.

It is obvious that this side of the building was never meant to be seen by the general public. Unfortunately, it is this side of the Follett House that faces across to the popular Ypsilanti Farmer's Market. Many Italianate buildings feature a lack of design and detail in their facades which do not face the main street.[11] However, there is an additional reason why so little attention was paid to the north facade of the Follett House. According to one of the buildings present owners, Gerald Meadows, and Tom Dodd, the editor of the Depot Town Rag, a railroad spur formerly ran directly behind the Follett House. Across the tracks from the hotel was an outbuilding which, perhaps, held kitchen facilities for the hotel dining room. Meadows and Dodd believe the hotel was connected to this building by tunnels under the tracks and maybe a walkway over the tracks. The third-story doors which now open into mid air would tend to support this theory. It is true that the land directly north of the building was part of the Follett House tract, though now it is being leased to the city for the Farmer's Market.[12] This explains the ugliness of the north facade. Because it was obscured by a railroad spur and an outbuilding, it was never necessary to give it a finished look.

Little remains that is original to the shop interiors. Over the past 129 years the occupants of these stores have changed countless numbers of times. At the present time the lower story is occupied by the Mean Bean Cafe, which is a Mexican restaurant; an art gallery; a resale clothing store; and a hair salon. In some stores the plaster itself has been removed from the walls, exposing the masonry beneath. Some of the original baseboards remain in the Mean Bean Cafe. They must be original because no one could afford such wonderful 16 inch baseboards at today's lumber

prices!

The entire second story and the third and fourth stories of the eastern wing are presently apartments and artist's studios. Originally, they were hotel rooms.[13] Access to these parts of the building was denied to me, but I did discover two sources which described some of the restoration to these spaces. The first of these is an article from the Ypsilanti Press. The eastern wing of the Follett House is owned by Carolyn and Gary McKeever. In late 1980, the McKeevers began remodeling a 1,500 foot space on the second floor. They hauled close to three tons of rubble out of the building and hired interior designer, Warren Lewis, architect, Tim Vachon, and carpenter, David Loomis to create a new living space for them.[14] Before and after pictures of this restoration to the Follett House can be seen in figures 22 and 23.

The second description of interior space comes from a 1985 guide to the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation's Historic Home Tour.

> Two of the six second-floor apartments will be on Tour. The first occupied by Lee Ann Flegel, looks out on the bridge and Cross Street....The second, smaller apartment was designed and built entirely by its occupant, Eric Ward, student of architecture at the University of Michigan. Peek behind his door and you will see the ticket window for Follett Hall.[15]

In this last description is a reference to the most interesting interior space of the building, the third-floor ballroom, formerly known as Follett Hall. The years have been far from kind to this former showplace. Natural and human forces have left their indelible mark on the interior (figures 24, 25 and 26), and yet the faded ornament and sheer scale of the

room still impose a vague sense of grandeur on the space.

The ballroom is approached by what was once an elegant curved stairway. At the foot of the stairs, remnants of wallpaper hang in shreds above the wainscoting (figure 27). A huge two-story window floods the stairwell with natural light (figures 28 and 29). Hand painted graining, though scratched and marred, can still be seen on the wainscoting (figure 30).

Inside the ballroom, wooden arches in the joist ceiling allow the room to clear a span of 43 by 60 feet. The ceiling stretches an imposing 22 feet above the hardwood floor. The floor once contained "sound deadening powders" which enable patrons to dance without disturbing others below them.[16] Early advertisements for the hotel boasted this room had "the best acoustics west of the Hudson."[17]

The ballroom also featured a small stage which once played host to such notables as General Tom Thumb and Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale.[18] This stage has been completely torn out of the room. The place where it used to stand is indicated only by an alcove on the north side of the room visible in figures 24 and 25. In figure 25, you can barely see the doorway that led off the stage into the greenroom. There was room to pass behind the stage unseen.[19]

The ornamentation of the room was done in a grand scale. The south and west walls are filled with two-story windows that let in a flood of natural light. These windows rise 11 feet from the wainscoting below and nearly touch the huge, 24 inch cornice above (figure 25). Traces of blue-grey paint can be seen on the cornice that remains. A muted rose-colored paint graces the walls below. This color scheme is echoed in the

remnants of the two plaster ceiling medallions (figures 31 and 32). Notice portions of gas lighting fixtures hanging from the center of each medallion. Notice also, the plaster and lathe construction over the wooden joists of the ceiling.

The eastern wall of the ballroom is punctured by two large archways which lead to a large room raised a foot and a half above the level of the main ballroom. It is believed this area was once used for dining.[20] This room is only one story. The fourth-floor space above it was once reached by a freight elevator. Now it can only be reached by step ladder. It is oddly partitioned and now stands empty (figures 33, 34 and 35). It was last used as a "shotgun" apartment.[21] This space and the space below, off of the ballroom, are directly behind the center section of the south facade (figure 15). On the fourth floor, a sense of incongruity is created by the contrast between the elegant Palladian window (figure 36) and the unkempt space it lights.

The Follett House has undergone many changes of ownership during its 129 year history and the condition of both the interior and exterior of the building reflect this. A brief chronology of the building's history might help to make its present condition more readily understandable. It was built in 1859. Two men are cited as the possible architects for the building. The first is John Weeks Flower, Jr. I found the reference to Flower on a three by five file card in the Ypsilanti Historical Museum archives. No sources for the information were cited, but it was in the handwriting of a former Ypsilanti City Historian, Louis S. White. Unfortunately, White is deceased so no explanation of the reference could be obtained. According to White, "John Weeks Flower, Jr. arrived at

Ypsilanti in 1843, contractor, builder. Built Follett House, D.L. Quirk House and Seminary. Could have built 220 N. Huron."[22] That is the entire reference. I could find no other references to Flower.

If Flower was the architect of all these buildings, he certainly was capable of building in a wide range of styles. The D. L. Quirk house for example, is built in Second Empire style (figure 37). Built in 1860, it is quite a departure from the solid massing of the Follett House.[23]

I discovered another possible architect for the Follett House in a very scholarly work by Sister Marie Hayda (her dissertation is an excellent source of information on the early history of Ypsilanti). The architect's name was James Curtiss. Curtiss received some formal training in architecture and design at the Avon Academy of Livingston County, New York. He was an experienced builder and a skilled mason. He moved to Ypsilanti in 1840 and remained until his death in 1864.[24] In family records, he is credited with building the Follett House, the Union Seminary, the first Normal School building, and the homes of Dr. Davis, Erastus Samson and John Gilbert, Jr.[25]

These buildings also represent a wide range of styles. The Davis home is a vernacular Greek Revival building (figure 38). The Gilbert House is another example of the Second Empire style (figure 39). The Follett House is a commercial Italianate.[26] According to Sister Hayda, Curtiss' "work does not show a single-mindedness for the classical style....This is not surprising, for...as a trained architect his plans took a wider range of models."[27]

Stylistic similarities, therefore, cannot confirm whether Flower, or Curtiss, or neither man was the architect for the Follett House. Of the

two possible architects, I would give greater credence to the claim for Curtiss. The sources of information are better documented. It is not impossible, however, that Flower worked under Curtiss as his builder-contractor during construction of the hotel.

Whoever it was who designed and built the Follett House, completed the work in time for the July 4, 1859 grand-opening celebration. Though it was considered the "grandest hotel on the Michigan Central line" and featured such modern amenities as steam-heated rooms on the first and second floors, it never seemed to be a financial success.[28] Evidence of the financial difficulty of the hotel can be found in the frequency of changes in the ownership and management of the concern.

Shortly after the hotel opened Benjamin Follett became the sole owner of the property.[29] Management was changed as early as December 9, 1859 (only five months after the hotel's grand opening), when Abiel Hawkins took over from John M. Davis. In June 1862, the building was rented by John M. Cutler. He was followed by Aaron H. Goodrich, A.N. Tisdale, and a Mr. Williams.[30] According to the Ypsilanti Panorama, "[Benjamin] Follett died at the age of forty-five in 1864. A year later, the hotel sold for 'the astonishing low figure of $10,000, an unknown newspaper reported at the time."[31] Perhaps the rapid turnover rate was responsible in part for the low purchase price. By 1873, John M. Cutler was once again the proprietor of the Follett House.[32]

Many historical accounts contradict the theory that the hotel was experiencing financial difficulty during this time period. According to Harvey C. Colburn, the Follett House was one of the most popular hotels in the area during the 1860's.[33] The entertainment provided by the theatre

and ballroom continued to attract patrons until the 1880's.[34]

Whether the hotel was a financial success or not, it continued to change hands often and not all of the new owners knew what they were getting into. Joseph H. Thompson in his "Memories of 'Early Depot Town'", provides us with an amusing story of how the hotel was once sold.

> ...Denny Doyle sold the Follett House. It seems business had fallen off quite a lot. Denny had wanted to sell the place so he heard about a fellow by the name of Mathias who was looking for a tavern [to buy] so he invited him to Ypsilanti to take a look at the Follett House. Denny was a little bit unscrupulous in his business actions but he got a group of fellows to go to Ann Arbor with suit cases and another group to go down to Wayne and when the Michigan Central train came in these fellows flocked into the Follett House to register and stay over night. Mathias was sitting in the lobby and he looked over the crowd and just then the train from Wayne came in. Well, the bar was doing business and the barber shop was doing business and Mathias was mesmerized by the amount of business he anticipated so he bought the place; and didn't they sell him another place up in the Thompson Building for an overflow of his patrons. Well he paid his money and he owned the hotel and Doyle was gone.[35]

Thompson dates this recollection at "just after 1900." I could find no record of a Denny Doyle owning the building but the Ypsilanti Commercial of November 16, 1888 recorded the sale of the Follett House "by A.L. Mowlin to Thomas Mathias, who took possession on Tuesday,

November 13, 1888."[36] Perhaps Doyle worked as an agent for A.L. Mowlin. Whether this is true or not, a case can be made that business was not booming at the Follett House.

Examination of the Ypsilanti Commercial reveals several interesting articles referring to ownership changes and renovations to the Follett House. On April 6, 1878, the Ypsilanti Commercial reported that "a portion of the awning in front of the Follett House has been removed. It adds a great deal to the appearance of the building and the owners would do well by tearing away the remainder."[37] That is sound advice from the last century that could still be applied today.

Apparently, the Follett House was closed sometime between 1878 and 1884, because in March of 1884 the Ypsilanti Commercial announced:

> The reopening of the Follett House will give eighty rooms. The proprietor, Mr. Geo. Moorman, is expending from $8,000 to $10,000 dollars in overhauling the house from top to bottom. The Hall will be made into rooms. The painting and papering is being done by Messrs. G.H. Gilmore and Lespronce and will be very attractive. The rejuvenated Hotel will be christened the 'Ypsilanti Mineral Springs Hotel' and will be opened May 1st. Mr. Moorman reserves a nice suite of rooms in the southwest corner for his family.[38]

March of 1884 then, was the date of the elegant ballroom's demise. George Moorman had it "made into rooms." Moorman did not stop there with his renovations to the old hotel. On July 12, 1884, the Ypsilanti Commercial published this two sentence item about the Follett House. "Mr. Moorman is re-building the ruins adjoining the Follett House. It will

form part of the hotel."[39] The cryptic reference to "ruins" is intriguing. Apparently, in 1884 it needed no further explanation. The same is not true today, because nowhere else could I find any reference to ruins adjacent to the Follett House. The closest I came was a 1963 Ypsilanti Press article which stated:

> At its [the Follett House's] rear are the remains of tunnels claimed to be part of the 'underground railway' through which slaves found their way to the river - thence to Canada. Long time residents discount this story and maintain the tunnels were but a system of drains to the river.[40]

By the 1890's, the Follett House ceased to be a hotel.[41] The turn of the century saw the beginning of a long decline for the building. In 1910, the building was sold in two parts and the main entrance was sealed. The bottom floor was used for retail space and the top two floors of the western end, including the ballroom, were sold to the Ypsilanti Cartage and Storage Company, later known as Mayflower Moving.[42] They ripped out the partitions added by George Moorman in 1884, added a freight elevator (figure 33), and used the building for storage.[43] Their occupancy, perhaps more than any other, is responsible for much of the damage to the once elegant third-floor ballroom.

Mayflower Moving remained in the building until 1970 when the building was completely abandoned. It stood empty until 1976 when it was bought by the present owners, the Follett House Associates, which in 1981 included Gerald Meadows and Marybelle and Alan Suczek.[44] Carolyn and Gary McKeever own the eastern portion of the building.[45] The present

owners have done much to restore the building and hope to do even more.

The building is certainly worthy of restoration. Its solid rectangular mass and relatively greater height give it a commanding presence in the neighborhood. As previously mentioned, the north side of the building is such a mess that it nearly defies visual analysis (figure 21). The west facade is one of the first sights which greets a traveler entering Depot Town from the west, hence the welcoming sign (figure 18). The restoration of the roof line and replacement of the cornice greatly improved the look of the building from this direction.

The west facade of the Follett House contains many features which are typical of a commercial Italianate building. The decoration is simpler than that of the main facade. Less attention is paid to detail, to the arrangement of openings, and to symmetry. Compare the west facade of the Follett House to the west facade of the Masonic Block, another commercial Italianate resident of Depot Town (figure 40). Try to ignore the modern stairway and notice the difference in detail between the street facade and the west side of the building. Much like the Follett House, the fenestration is asymmetrical. No elaborate window hoods adorn the western windows and the ornamentation above the small, upper cornice is not continued on this side of the building.

Another feature these two buildings have in common with many commercial Italianate buildings is the way in which the end store wraps around the corner (figures 20 and 41). The Masonic Block has no cornice which separates the first story from the upper portion of the building, instead a different course of brick separates the two parts. This beltcourse continues around the building to form a return in the same way

the first-story cornice forms a return on the Follett House. Beneath the returns the display windows are arranged identically. A transom window is separated by a horizontal framing member from a large display window, beneath which is a wooden kickboard with a decorative panel. The treatments of the corners of the two lower stories differ. The Masonic Block features a cast iron column as a corner support. The brick piers of the Follett House give its corner a sturdier appearance.

The south facade of the hotel is by far the most interesting visually (figure 3). The increase in the scale of fenestration as the eye moves upward gives a vertical accent to the basically horizontal emphasis of the building. It accentuates the height differences between the Follett House and its neighbors. It looks as if the building has a sense of self-importance. The decoration is restrained with classical references such as the Palladian window, round-headed Roman arches, and pediment window hoods. Both the increase in scale and the restrained classicism are typical of Italianate commercial buildings of the mid-nineteenth century.[46]

The feature of the building which produces the greatest visual impact is the asymmetrical fenestration in the upper portion. It attracts the viewer's eye and arouses curiosity. It gives the building an unbalanced feeling. The eastern and center sections of the facade seem to stretch upward towards the cornice, while the western portion seems content to remain sedentary. The sense of upward movement is missing. The fenestration also tends to lead the eye eastward. The rhythm quickens as the eye moves from west to east. Viewing the building from an oblique angle really enhances this effect (figure 42).

Very few commercial Italianate buildings are asymmetrical in their upper portions. Retail space on the lower story is often asymmetrical, as it is in the Follett House, because the store fronts are built and rebuilt to suit the needs of the occupants. Only rarely is this carried over into the upper portions of the building. The street facade of the Winooski Block is more typical of the style (figures 43 and 44).[47] This building has a central bay defined by the way the cornice breaks the flat roof line, though it is more elaborate than that of the Follett House. However, unlike the Follett House, the fenestration on either side of the bay is evenly spaced, similarly ornamented, and symmetrically arranged.

In looking through the two popular pattern books originally published by Marcus Fayette Cummings and Charles Crosby Miller in 1865 and 1873, I could find only one example of a commercial building with an asymmetrical facade (figure 45).[48] The differences between the two sides of the facade are much more subtle than those found in the Follett House, however. It is not clear that the authors even intended the finished building to be asymmetrical. It could be they were merely illustrating variations available to the builder.

Maybe Follett is rare in having a ballroom & hotel.

The Masonic Block, already mentioned in this paper, has many things in common with the Follett House. Both buildings were financed by Benjamin Follett.[49] Both buildings contain third-floor ballrooms. Both buildings are built in the same style and they both have asymmetrical facades. The Masonic block is asymmetrical because it was built in three parts. Numbers 46, 48, and 50 Cross Street (figure 46), were built in 1854. Follett planned to add onto the eastern end of the building, so he made the western section wider by one window. When the entire block

maybe it was deliberately designed that way to sell or rent as 3 different bldgs.

was completed, the wider section of the western end of the block was matched by one at the eastern end. Unfortunately, a train wreck has demolished the eastern end of the Masonic Block and the pattern is no longer apparent.[50]

Perhaps the Follett House is asymmetrical for the same reason. According to one local architect, "the facade reveals at least two phases of construction, unmatched but similar."[51] Tom Dodd believes that the center and eastern sections of the building constitute the first phase of construction. Later, when business started to decline for the hotel, Benjamin Follett felt he needed entertainment to attract more customers. He built the western section of the building which included the ballroom and the tiny stage.[52] If this is true, then the original Follett House must have looked something like figure 47 and the caption of figure 10 should read "Shortly After *Re*-opening." But that makes no visual sense at all, in the St. Style.

I could find no record of such a large improvement of the property in the city tax or assessment rolls. There is evidence on the facades of the building, however, which would tend to support this theory. The most obvious evidence is the difference in the visual unity of the three sections of the main facade (figure 3). The eastern and center sections seem to belong together. Shapes and building techniques used in one are echoed in the other. For example, the shapes created by the Palladian window are echoed in the round-headed windows of the eastern section. The use of layers of brick to frame and accentuate decorative elements is a device used in both sections. In contrast, the western section is much plainer. Its flat surface of brick is punctured by square-headed windows which bear no relationship to the shapes used in the other two sections.

Examination of the detailing on the windows of the building also tends to support this theory. Compare the window caps of the second floor. The caps on the eastern section (figure 17a) and the one on the center section (figure 15a) are very similar. The center cap is longer, but the finials between the swan's neck pediment are identical. Compare these with a second story window hood on the western end of the Follett House (figure 14); the pediment has no finial. Differences in window treatments usually occur vertically, between stories, rather than horizontally, in the commercial Italianate style. See figure 46, the Masonic Block, for an example. Perhaps the caps are different because the original window caps were no longer available or affordable at the time of the western addition's construction.

Interior construction also lends support to Dodd's theory. The second floor of the western section is about a foot and a half shorter than the rest of the second story. This can be clearly seen where the western section meets the rest of the building in the third-floor ballroom (figure 26). The adjoining room is raised three steps.

If the Follett House was built in two parts, then the original building was certainly atypical in its massing (figure 47). This seems to imply that, like the Masonic Block, an addition to the building was planned from the beginning. If this is true, at least one unanswered question remains; why is the addition so much plainer than the original? Victorian tastes were changing during this time period, but they were changing towards a more ornate architectural style.[53] Perhaps the financial difficulties of the hotel dictated a simpler form.

The Italianate style has over the years proved to be a versatile and

attractive form for commercial districts. The Follett House is typical of the style in many ways. Its mass is basically rectangular, with a flat roof line and a large projecting cornice. The materials include brick masonry bearing walls with cast iron decoration. More attention is paid to decoration and detail on the main facade than on secondary ones.

The street face of the building is divided horizontally into two parts. The first story is given over to retail space and a few secondary entrances. Storefronts feature large display windows, with wooden kickboards beneath, and a clerestory transom above. The entrances to stores are recessed and framed by decorative cast iron columns. The lower story is separated from the upper portion of the building by its own decorative cornice.

The upper portion of the building features windows with decorative caps. Window treatments differ from one story to the next. Classical references are made through the decoration. Examples include pediments, Roman arches and the Palladian window. A central bay, like the one found on the Follett House, is common in the more elaborate buildings of the style. It often highlighted the main entrance below.[54]

Some features of the Follett House are atypical of the commercial Italianate style. Most street facades in commercial Italianate architecture are symmetrical or, like the Masonic Block, they serve to make the block, of which they are a part, symmetrical. Though window treatments often vary from one story to the next in this style, they do not often vary within a story. Windows are usually spaced regularly or at least establish a rhythmic pattern. The existence of atypical features in the Follett House might be explained by the theory that the building was

built in two parts.

Luckily, the Follett House is part of a thriving historic district where there seems to be genuine concern for the buildings and the history they represent. In 1981, the Ypsilanti City council voted to apply for $118,500 in federal grant money to fund a renovation proposed by the Follett House Associates. The plans were approved by the city's Historic District Commission and the United States Historic Conservation and Recreation Service. The renovation was "to include construction of two stair towers in the rear of the building, restoration of the facade, extensive restoration of the interior, and reconstruction of the north and west walls."[55]

Unfortunately, the application was refused and restoration to the Follett House has moved slowly. The cornice was replaced in 1986 and some work has been done on the facade. Currently, Gerald Meadows is seeking suggestions for the conversion and use of the once proud ballroom. At one point, the Ypsilanti Players were considering utilizing the space as a performance venue. However, modern fire codes strictly forbid second story theaters with such limited access. The room cries out for restoration but costs are prohibitive. Without some kind of outside financial support, I doubt the present owners can encompass them. I do not know who can provide that kind of help, but I hear the popularity of ballroom dancing is once again on the rise in America. Perhaps the Arthur Murray Dance Studios would like to train a new generation of hoofers in a space which echoes with the gentile steps of an older generation.

Fig. 1 Benjamin Follett

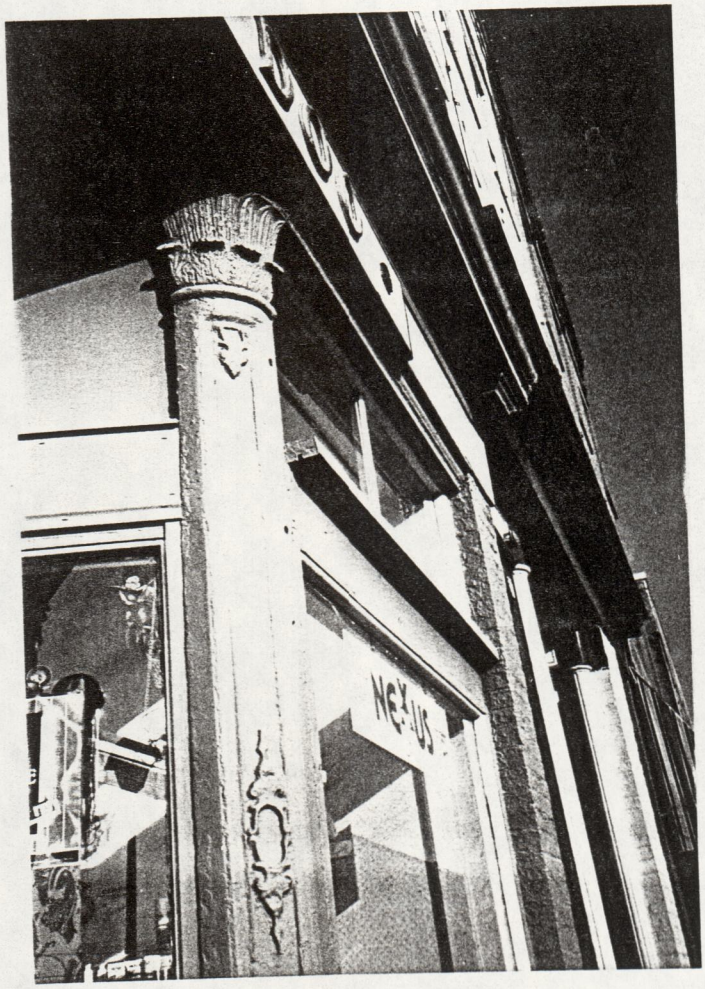
Fig. 2 Follett House, 1986

Fig. 3 Follett House, south facade.

Fig. 4. Detail, cast iron capital.

Fig. 5 Detail, cast iron capital.

Fig. 6 Follet House, store front.



← Fig. 7 Detail, storefront.

Fig. 8 Follett House, 1944.

Fig. 9 Follett House, 1944.

Fig. 10 Follett House, "Shortly After Opening."

Fig. 11 FOLLETT HOUSE 1980

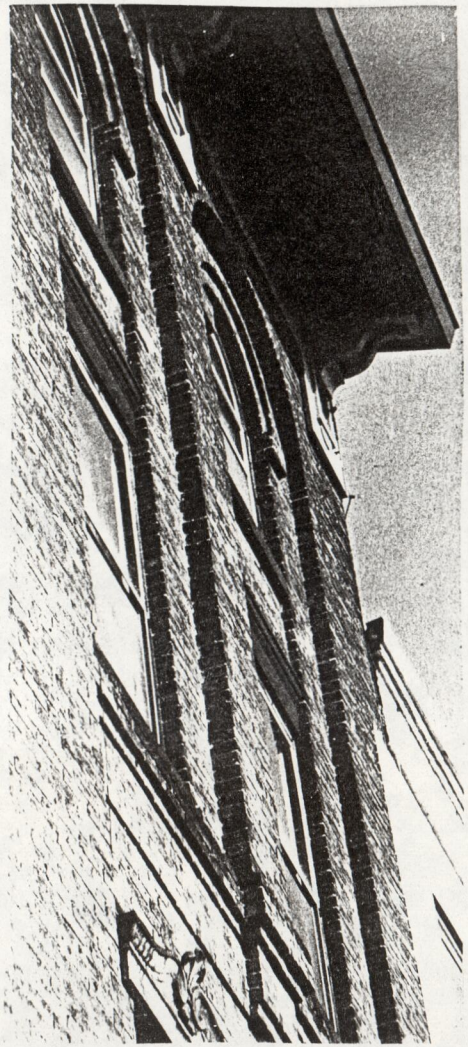


Fig. 12 Detail, cornice.

Fig. 13 Detail, third floor, ballroom window.

Fig. 14 Detail, South facade: western 2nd floor windows.

Fig. 15 Detail, central bay.

Fig. 15a Window cap, 2nd floor, central bay.

Fig. 15b Detail, Palladian window.

Fig 16 Follett House, 1900.

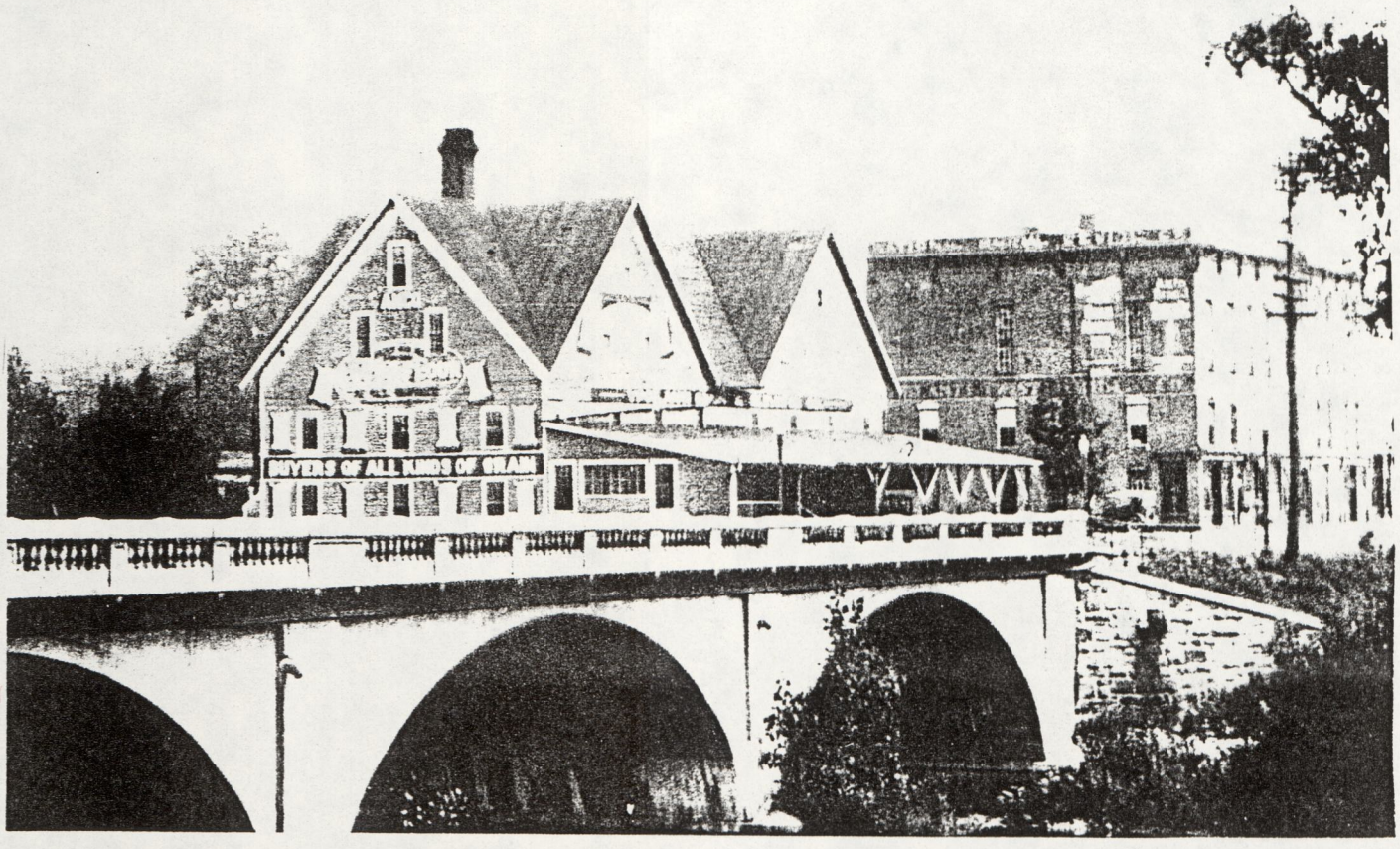


Fig. 17 Eastern section of south facade.

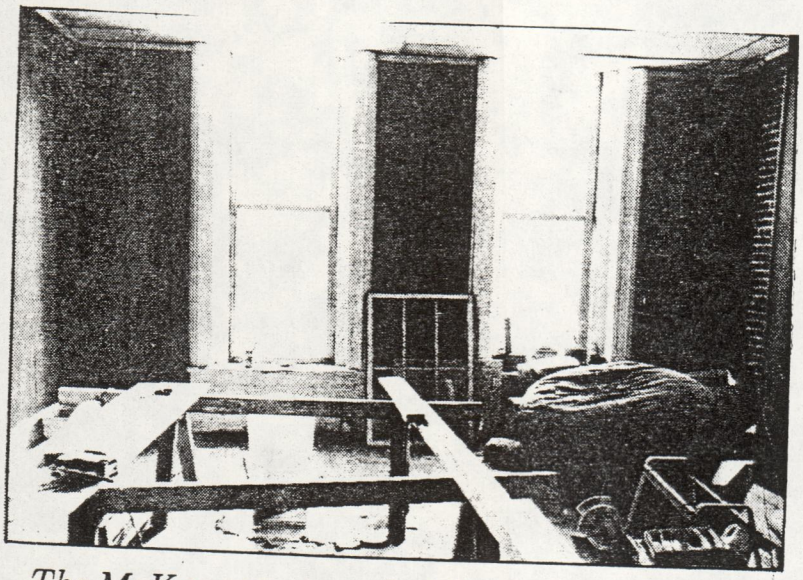
Fig. 17a. Window cap, 2nd floor of eastern section.

Fig. 18 Follett House, west facade.

Fig. 19 Follett House, circa 1936.

Fig. 20 West facade, detail.

Fig. 21 Follett House, north facade.



The McKeevers started with a bare apartment

Press photos
by Dorothy Neaton

Fig. 22

Fig. 23

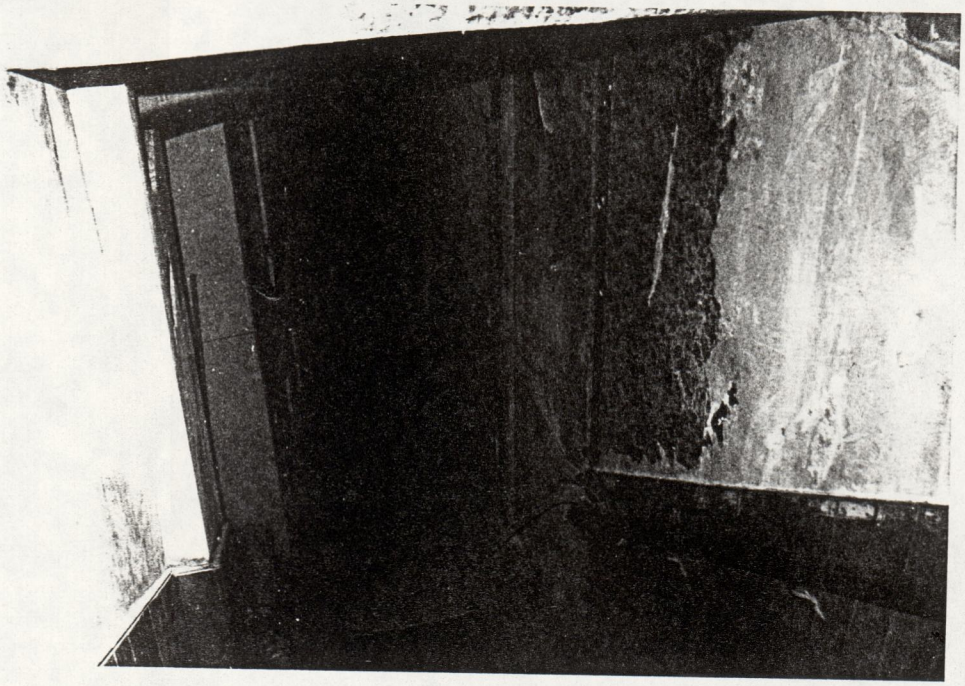
Carolyn McKeever is happy with apartment she and husband Gary reclaimed

Fig. 24 Ballroom looking north. →

Fig. 25 Ballroom looking northwest. ←

Fig. 26 Ballroom looking east. →

Fig. 27



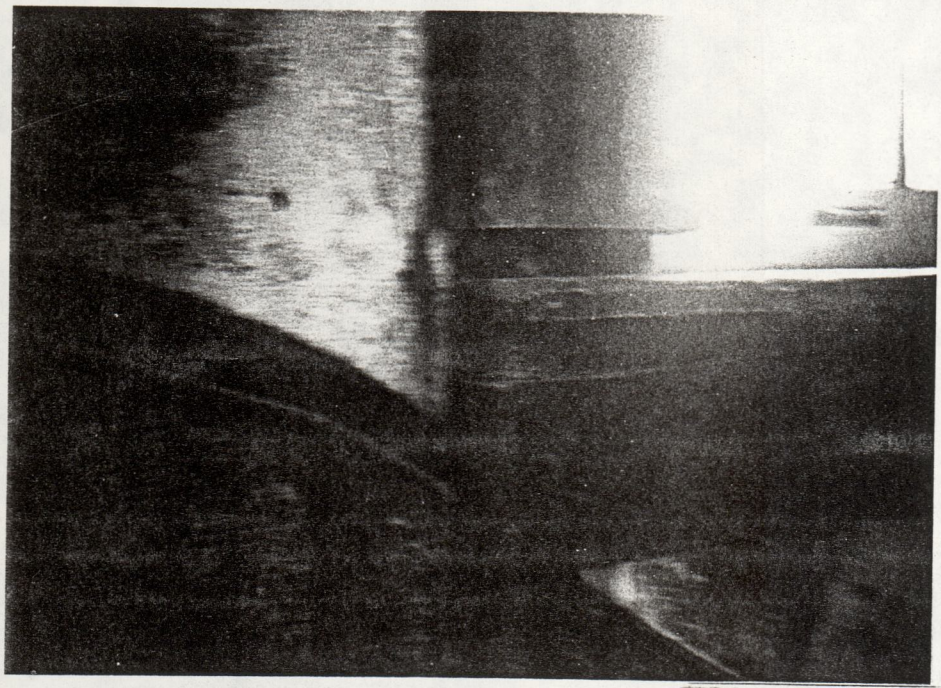


Fig. 28

Follett House:
Details of stairwell.

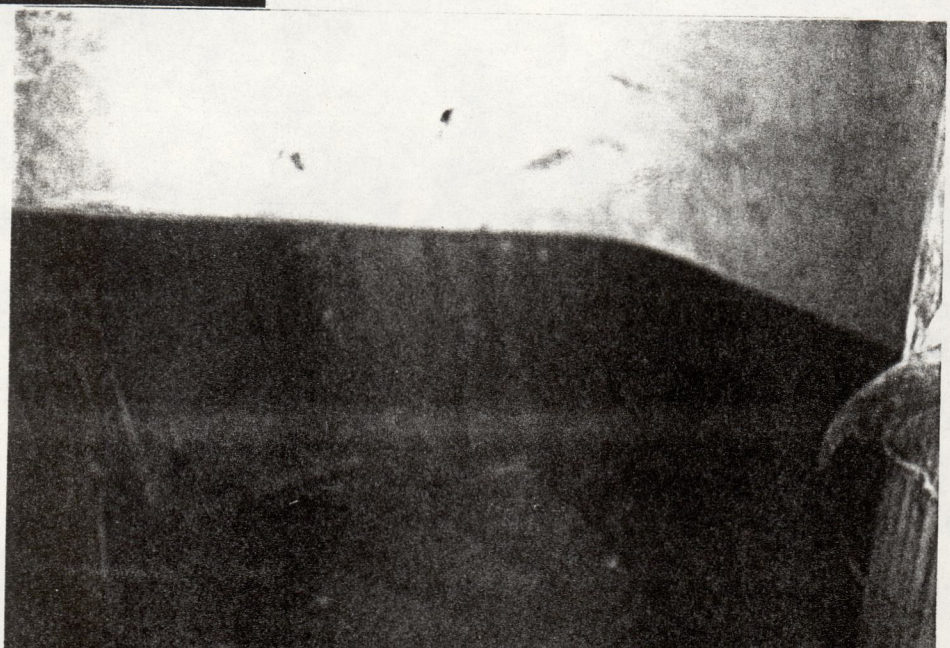


Fig. 29

Fig. 30 Waiascoting in stairwell.

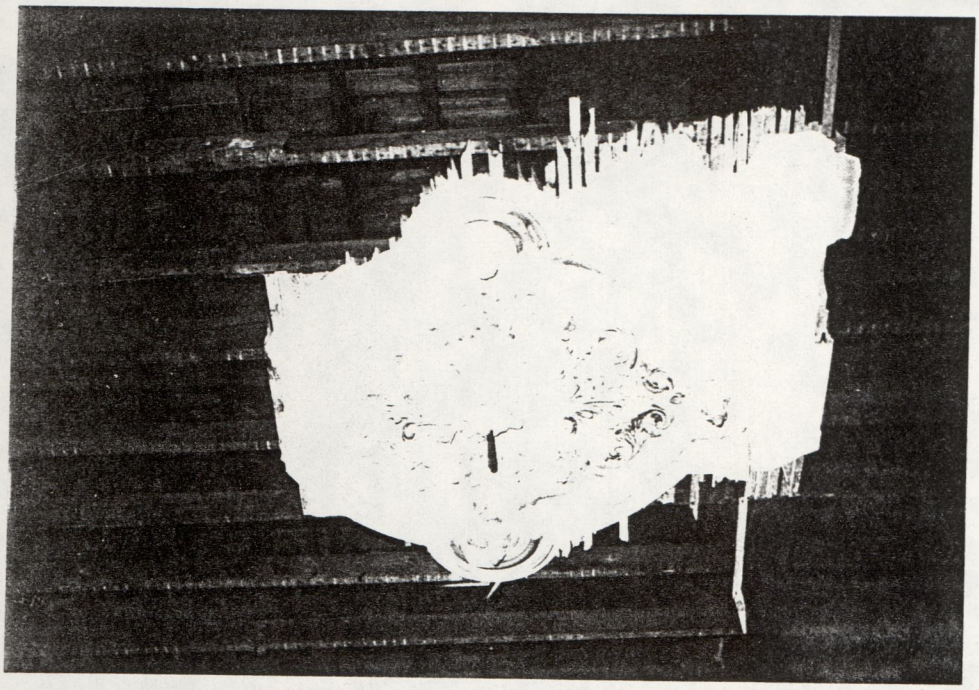


Fig. 31 Ballroom medallion

Fig. 32 Ballroom medallion.

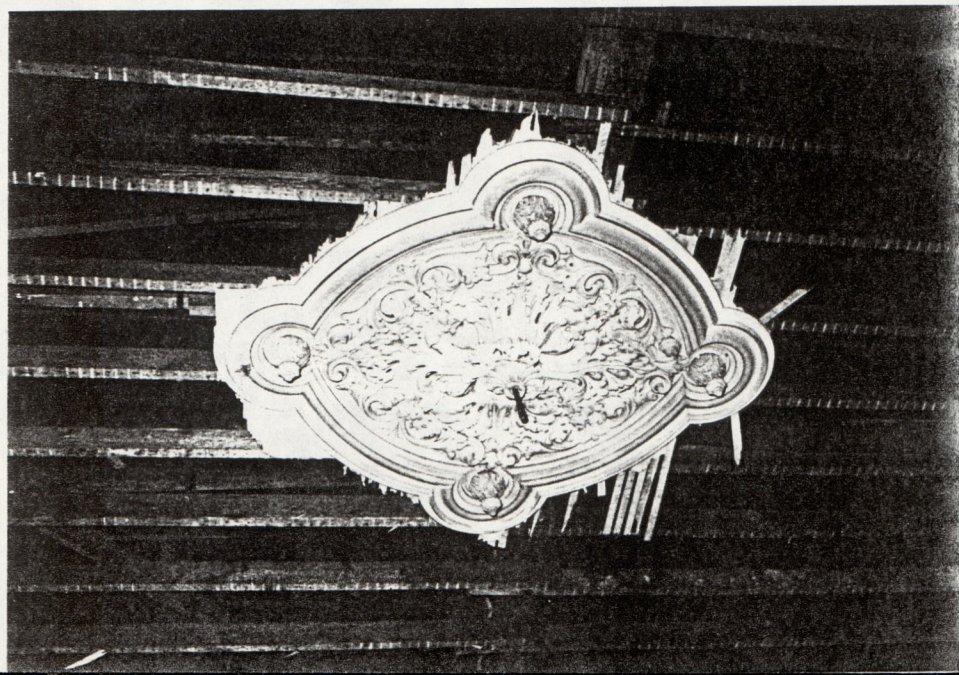
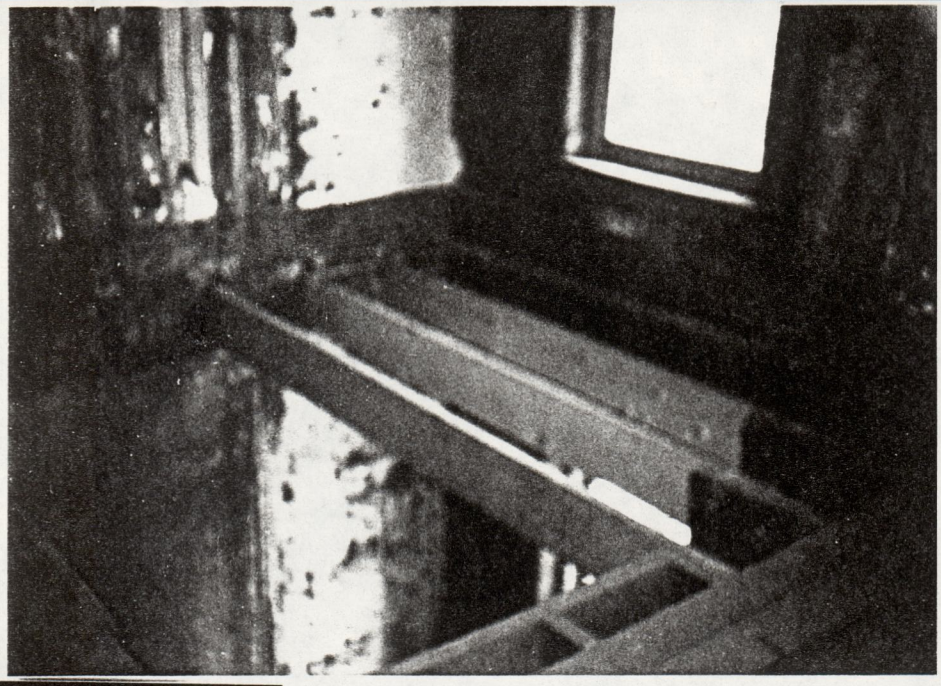


Fig. 33 Freight elevator shaft.



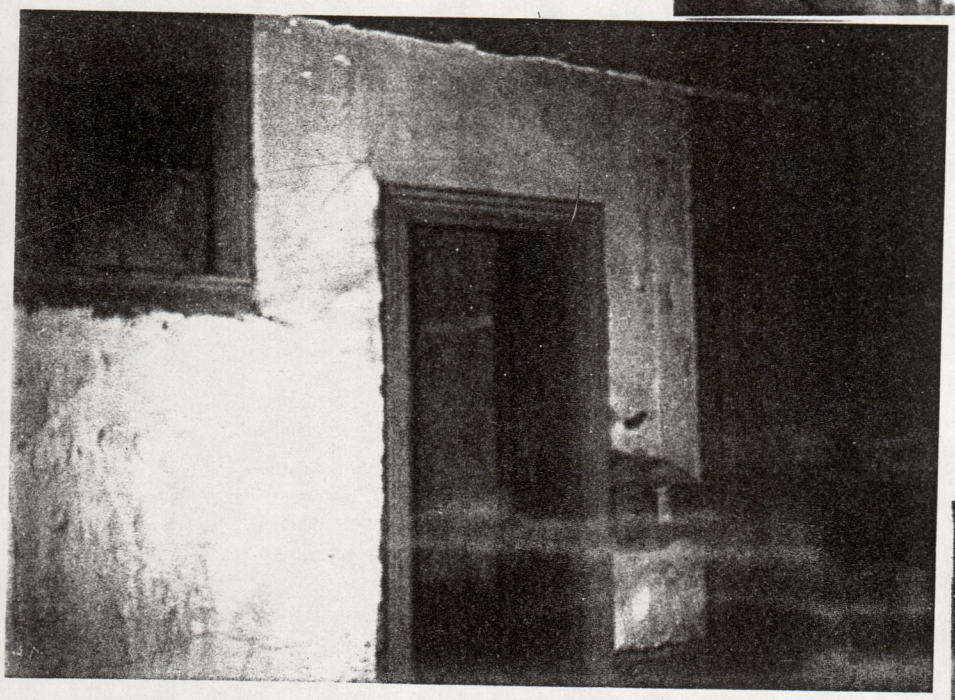


Fig. 34 Fourth floor, Follett House.

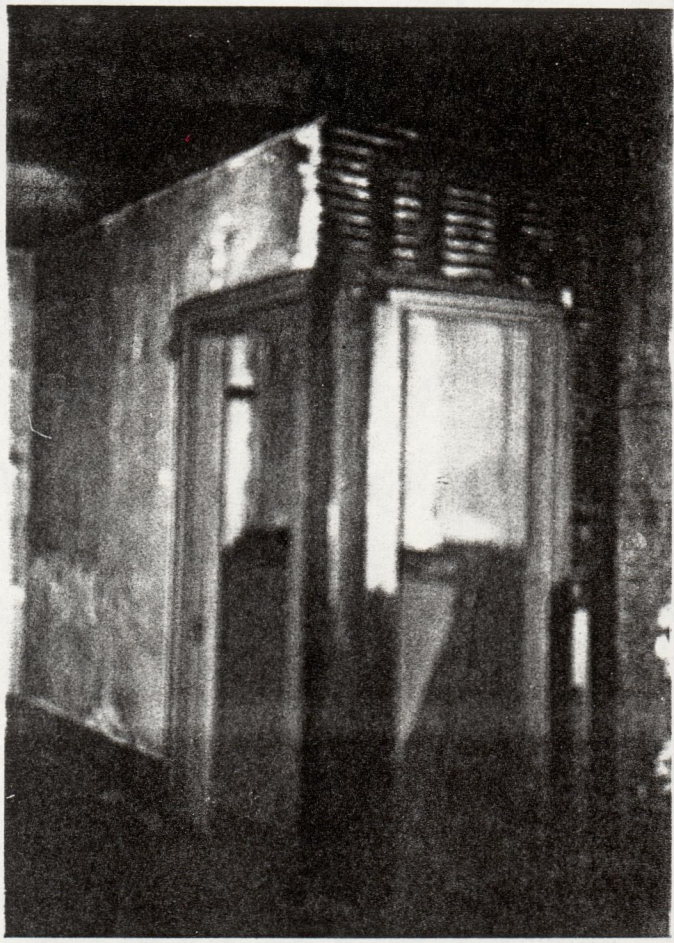


Fig. 35 Fourth floor, Follett House.

Fig. 36 Palladian window

Fig. 37 D.L. Quirk House

Fig. 38 Dr. Davis House

Bird 44

Fig. 39 Gilbert House

Fig. 46 Masonic Block, North facade.

Fig. 47 Follett House, section of south facade.

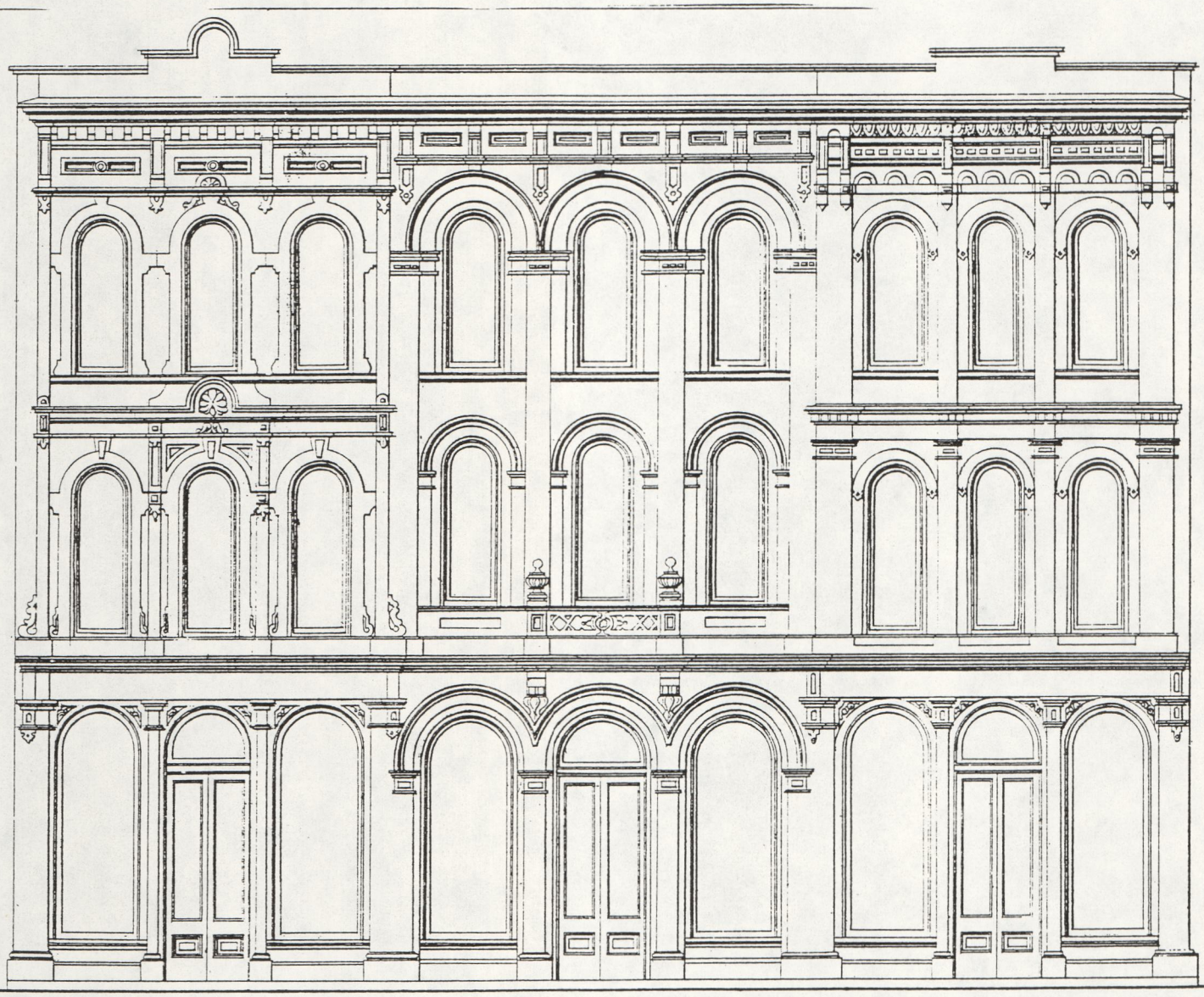


Fig. 45 Architecture, Plate 16 Fig. 1.

Fig. 44 Winooski Block, Winooski, Vermont.

Fig. 42 Follett House, 1988.

An early rendering of the Winooski Block, showing its importance as a center of activity.

Fig. 43. Winooski Block, Winooski, Vermont.

Fig. 40 Masonic Block.

Fig. 41 Masonic Block, detail of west facade.